

MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT 2006-2007 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

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Introduction

In June 2005, the Ontario government took a strong stand on accessibility when it passed the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) into law.

The AODA lays out a comprehensive road map to make Ontario accessible to all people through the development, implementation and enforcement of new, mandatory accessibility standards for some of the most important aspects of people's lives.

The first two standards that are currently being developed cover the areas of transportation and customer service. On June 13, the first anniversary of the passage of the AODA, the government announced the development of three new standards that will address information and communications, the built environment, and employment.

While the government is moving forward to implement the AODA, there will be a transition period where government and the broader public sector will continue to meet their obligations under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA). These obligations will remain in effect until they are repealed and replaced by standards under the new act.

Under the ODA, Ontario government ministries, municipalities, hospitals, school boards, colleges, universities and public transportation organizations are required to develop annual accessibility plans to make policies, practices, programs, services and buildings more accessible to people with disabilities. These plans must be made available to the public. Accessibility planning efforts to date have developed a strong foundation for the development of accessibility standards that will mean real and effective change.

This document is the fourth annual accessibility plan developed by the Ministry of the Environment. It highlights the achievements of the 2005-06 plan and outlines the commitments for 2006-07 so that no new barriers are created and, over time, existing ones are removed.

This ministry intends to build on its achievements by implementing initiatives that support the government's commitment to continue to make Ontario an inclusive and accessible province where people of all abilities have a chance to fully achieve their potential.

Message from the Minister



As Minister of the Environment, I am pleased to share our 2006-2007 Accessibility Plan. All public sector and broader public sector organizations are required by law to have an annual accessibility plan and to make it available to the public. This is the fourth year in which plans have been written and are being implemented by organizations such as ours across the province.

This year marks the first anniversary of the landmark Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, (AODA) – legislation that will foster the development, implementation and enforcement of accessibility standards in key areas of daily living.

To commemorate this milestone, three new accessibility standards to be developed in the areas of communications and information, the built environment, and employment were recently announced. This is in addition to two standards already being developed, which deal with customer service and transportation.

My ministry is committed to improving accessibility through identifying, removing and preventing barriers, working together within our ministry, across government and with our stakeholders in key areas of customer service, employment, communications and information, and the built environment.

Here at the Ministry of the Environment, we are building on the success of our previous three plans and continuing to look for ways to better meet the needs of people with disabilities who come into contact with this ministry, regardless of whether they are staff, members of the general public or ministry stakeholders.

In 2005-2006, this ministry demonstrated continued leadership in improving accessibility by considering accessibility issues in both the development and review of ministry acts and regulations. For example, Bill 43, the proposed Clean Water Act, 2005, has been reviewed to ensure it contains no barriers to accessibility.

If you have any comments or concerns, I encourage you to send them using the contact information located at the end of this document.

Sincerely,

The Honourable Laurel C. Broten

Report on Achievements

2005 - 2006 Accessibility Improvement Initiatives

The Ministry of the Environment was successful in achieving 13 of 15 planned commitments outlined in its 2005-2006 accessibility plan and plans are in place to complete the remaining two commitments. This section provides a status report.

Commitment: Ensure that ministry Internet sites are accessible by testing all new site content.

Status: Completed.

Action: Ministry Internet sites are tested as they are developed or modified.

Timeframe: Ongoing.

Commitment: Provide staff with the resources to incorporate accessibility considerations in all procurement activities.

Status: Completed.

Action: The ministry's procurement intranet website was updated to improve the availability of accessibility-related resources. The website highlights the ODA requirements and links to the OPS Procurement Directives intranet website, which lists resource materials.

Timeframe: October 2005.

Commitment: Make resources available to provide ergonomic assessments for ministry staff with disabilities, as required.

Status: Completed.

Action: Resource materials and contact information are available through the business services managers, as well as through facilities management and Human Resources staff. An Ergonomic Tip Sheet for Laptops and Personal Digital Assistants was developed and provided to all business service managers. The Ergonomic Tip Sheet is also posted on the ministry's Human Resources Branch intranet website.

Timeframe: Ongoing.

Commitment: Promote emergency and evacuation procedures to encourage staff who may require assistance to identify themselves to their managers.

Status: Completed.

Action: All employees were provided with an Emergency Evacuation Handbook, and staff with disabilities were encouraged to self identify to their managers for the purpose of facilitating emergency evacuation. Emergency evacuation procedures continue to be posted on the ministry intranet site and fire drills are conducted yearly in all ministry occupied buildings.

Timeframe: Ongoing.

Commitment: Educate staff and managers on the ODA and AODA.

Status: In progress.

Action: The ministry's third annual Accessibility Plan was shared with all staff in a hub mail on September 30, 2005. The hub mail highlighted new resources for staff and included a link to the ministry's updated ODA intranet website, which provides information on the Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Managers and supervisors have been reminded to complete the mandatory online training, entitled: "The Ontarians with Disabilities Act – Maximizing the Contribution of Employees with Disabilities", if they have not already done so.

In terms of actions still to be taken, the ministry's ODA intranet website will be updated to inform all staff about the implementation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and will include information for front-line staff about how to provide service to people with disabilities.

Timeframe: Fall 2006.

Rationale: Education on AODA is linked to corporate communication on the implementation of the AODA.

Commitment: Incorporate the ministry accessibility goals and objectives in senior management performance agreements.

Status: Completed.

Action: Managerial responsibility is set out in the OPS Accountability Directive and covers authority, accountability and responsibility for relevant statutes (such as the ODA) and regulations, as well as administrative, financial, human resource, and information technology directives, and related guidelines and policies. This responsibility is captured in each senior manager's performance management plan as part of their core management elements.

Timeframe: Ongoing.

Commitment: Ensure that meetings, training programs and similar activities provided by the ministry are accessible to people with disabilities.

Status: Completed.

Action: Training programs are reviewed as they are developed to ensure accessibility. All ministry-occupied buildings have barrier-free access. Guides for planning accessible meetings and events are posted on the ministry's ODA intranet website under Resources.

Timeframe: Ongoing.

Commitment: Make the procedures for responding to requests for publications in accessible formats available to staff.

Status: Completed.

Action: The ministry's intranet website directs staff to the ministry's Public Information Centre for requests concerning publications in alternate formats.

Timeframe: Ongoing.

Commitment: Provide an opportunity for staff to contribute accessibility-related feedback through the ODA website and electronic staff newsletter.

Status: Completed.

Action: The ministry's ODA intranet website invites staff to submit any questions or feedback they may have about accessibility-related issues by telephone or email. Staff may also submit accessibility-related articles to the ministry's e-MOE newsletter.

Timeframe: Ongoing.

Commitment: Work with landlords of ministry facilities to remove barriers, including the implementation of the new standards for barrier-free design.

Status: Completed.

Action: All architects/designers are aware of the Ontario Realty Corporation Standards for Barrier-Free Design and these requirements are considered in all project plans for new or renovated space.

Timeframe: Ongoing.

Commitment: Review new 1-800 services to determine the requirements for providing TTY access.

Status: Completed.

Action: New 1-800 services are reviewed and requirements are determined on a case-by-case basis.

Timeframe: Ongoing.

Commitment: Complete the review of the wording on facilities management request forms to ensure the needs of employees with disabilities are accommodated quickly, so they can perform their duties easily and safely.

Status: Completed.

Action: The wording on facilities management request forms has been reviewed to address the needs of employees with disabilities.

Timeframe: October 2005.

Commitment: The Environmental Protection Act (EPA) and its regulations will be assessed for accessibility as they come up for review, and modified, as required.

Status: In progress.

Action: The EPA and its regulations to date have been reviewed and contain no barriers to accessibility. The ministry has also reviewed the Act and its regulations for possible accessibility-related enhancements with a view to bringing these forward in a consolidated approach.

Timeframe: Provisions requiring accessibility enhancement were identified in 2005/2006 and these are expected to be brought forward by the summer of 2007.

Rationale: A consolidated approach will ensure that there are no gaps in accessibility enhancement in the EPA or its regulations.

Commitment: Review the Ontario Water Resources Act (OWRA) and its regulations for any impact on people with disabilities.

Status: Completed.

Action: The ministry has reviewed the OWRA and its regulations to ensure there are no impacts on people with disabilities.

Timeframe: Review completed in Spring 2006.

Commitment: Consider accessibility issues in the development and review of ministry acts, regulations, policies, programs and services.

Status: Completed.

Action: Accessibility issues are considered as new initiatives are developed. For example, Bill 43, the proposed Clean Water Act, 2005, has been reviewed to ensure it contains no barriers to accessibility.

Timeframe: Ongoing.

Ongoing Accessibility Improvement Initiatives

The Ministry of the Environment was successful in achieving a number of ongoing commitments described in the accessibility plans it issued before 2005 - 2006. While the majority of the ministry's ongoing commitments are noted under either "2005-2006 Accessibility Improvement Initiatives" or "Measures to Prevent New Barriers", this section provides a status report on two additional ongoing initiatives.

Commitment: Ensure that the ministry's Environmental Registry is accessible.

Status: Ongoing.

Action: Key ministry staff are trained on how to create accessible documents for Environmental Registry postings and guidelines are in place to assist ministry staff in this regard.

Timeframe: The Environmental Registry was made accessible in December 2002 and work to convert historical notices (Instrument Decision Notices older than November 1, 2002) to a more accessible format

was completed in 2003. Environmental Registry postings are reviewed for accessibility as they are developed or modified.

Commitment: Maintain an ODA intranet website to inform staff about the ODA, its requirements and the ministry's annual accessibility plan.

Status: Ongoing.

Action: The ministry's ODA intranet website contains various information and resource materials to educate staff about the ministry's accessibility goals and achievements. In addition to the annual accessibility plan, the site includes the ministry's accessibility statement, successes to date, guidelines for internet posting, descriptions of disabilities and barriers, and a list of resource tools to assist staff in accessibility planning. It also includes a feedback mechanism for staff to comment and identify barriers in their workplace. The website is updated on an ongoing basis.

Timeframe: A hub mail, containing the ministry's third annual Accessibility Plan, as well as the link to the ministry's ODA intranet website, was sent to all staff on September 30, 2005..

Commitments — Measures to Prevent New Barriers

In the coming year, the ministry commits to assess its acts, regulations, policies, programs, practices and services to determine their effect on accessibility for persons with disabilities. This section summarizes these commitments.

Customer Service

We will remind staff in an eMOE newsletter article to consider accessibility requirements when planning meetings and events. We will also continue to make the guides for planning accessible meetings and events available on our ODA intranet website.

Employment

We will inform new staff about the AODA by including information in ministry orientation materials. Information about the ODA, its requirements and the ministry's annual accessibility plan are included in orientation materials for new staff.

We will continue to provide employment accommodation for government employees and applicants, as it pertains to accessibility needs. For example, during the interview and hiring process, the ministry accommodates candidates with disabilities by:

- providing visually impaired candidates with special software;
- allowing candidates extra time to complete tests and interviews;
- providing questions in large print;
- using a sign language interpreter;
- letting visually impaired candidates bring their own computers to an interview.

We will remind new managers and supervisors to complete the mandatory online training course, entitled: "The Ontarians with Disabilities Act – Maximizing the Contribution of Employees with Disabilities", if they have not done so already.

We will continue to consider the needs of people with disabilities in ministry emergency management planning.

We will continue to promote emergency and evacuation procedures to encourage new staff who may require assistance to identify themselves to their managers.

Communications and Information

We will continue to test ministry Internet sites for accessibility as they are developed or modified.

We will post "A Guide to Alternative Formats for Government Publications" on the ministry's ODA intranet website to provide guidance to staff on the process for handling requests for publications in alternate formats to print.

We will continue to provide staff with the resources to incorporate accessibility considerations in all procurement activities. Information about ODA procurement requirements is available on the ministry's procurement intranet website.

The ministry's Legal Services Branch will continue to assist staff in their procurement requirements so that the procurement complies with the ODA.

Built Environment

We will continue to ensure that the new standards for barrier-free design are implemented as existing space is renovated and/or new space is obtained.

We will continue to make ergonomic assessment resource materials available through business service managers, as well as human resources and facilities management staff.

Acts and Regulations

The ministry will continue to consider accessibility issues in the development and review of ministry acts and regulations.

Other barriers

The ministry will support the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario to implement the AODA.

We will update the ministry's intranet website to better inform staff about the ODA and the AODA.

We will inform staff about the ODA and the AODA by writing quarterly eMOE newsletter articles about accessibility-related matters, and will invite staff to share feedback about existing barriers or submit ideas on how to prevent barriers.

We will establish a log to track and follow up on all accessibility-related inquiries.

We will convene quarterly meetings of the ministry's Accessibility Planning Working Group to monitor commitments in our annual accessibility plan and to improve accessibility for employees and the public by identifying barriers and measures to prevent or remove them.

We will review the results of the 2006 OPS Employee Survey to identify any ministry accessibility-related issues.

Commitments — Barriers to be Addressed

The Ministry of the Environment commits to identify, remove and prevent barriers to persons with disabilities in the coming year. This section summarizes these commitments.

Customer service

Barrier: Front-line staff may not be familiar with how to provide service to customers with disabilities.

Commitment: The ministry will encourage all front-line staff to complete the online "May I Help You – Welcoming Customers with Disabilities" training program, once it is available through the MyOPS website at the Centre for Leadership and Learning. In the meantime, the ministry will post information about how to provide service to people with disabilities on the ministry's ODA intranet site and make staff aware of these educational materials through an article in our eMOE newsletter.

Responsibility: Business and Fiscal Planning Branch / Human Resources Branch.

Timeline: Fall 2006.

Employment accommodation

Barrier: Managers and supervisors may require additional tools to support them in meeting the requirements of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Commitment: The ministry will develop an online Toolkit for Managers and Supervisors (including Business Service Managers) to assist them in meeting ODA requirements.

Responsibility: Business and Fiscal Planning Branch / Human Resources Branch.

Timeline: Spring 2007.

Communications and information

Barrier: People with disabilities may not be aware that ministry publications may be available in alternate formats.

Commitment: We will update the Publications page of the ministry's Internet website to highlight that requests for ministry publications in alternate formats may be made through the ministry's Public Information Centre. We will also post "A Guide to Multiple Formats for Communications" on the same page to assist people requesting publications in alternate formats.

Responsibility: Communications Branch.

Timeline: Fall 2006.

Barrier: Ministry signage may present possible barriers to accessibility.

Commitment: Ministry staff will consider accessibility when replacing signage in buildings.

Responsibility: Business and Fiscal Planning Branch.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Barrier: Additional input is required to identify possible barriers to accessibility.

Commitment: We will invite staff to share feedback about existing barriers and ways to remove or prevent them through a web-based survey. We will complete the Accessibility Directorate's Accessibility Quotient Questionnaire to determine the current level of accessibility in various areas of service delivery, physical access, design and maintenance.

Responsibility: Business and Fiscal Planning Branch.

Timeline: Summer 2007.

Built environment

Barrier: People who use wheelchairs cannot access the stage in the auditorium at the ministry's Resources Road facility.

Commitment: Ministry facilities management staff will work with the Ontario Realty Corporation and PROFAC to develop options to improve accessibility to the auditorium stage.

Responsibility: Business and Fiscal Planning Branch

Timeline: Summer 2007

Barrier: Wheelchair users and people with visual impairments and limited mobility may experience difficulty navigating the ministry's Resources Road facility.

Commitment: Ministry facilities management staff will work with the Ontario Realty Corporation to implement a Way Finding System at the Resources Road facility. The Way Finding System uses colour-coded signage and a numbering system to help staff and visitors navigate the building.

Responsibility: Business and Fiscal Planning Branch.

Timeline: Fall 2006.

Acts and regulations

Barrier: Existing ministry legislation should be reviewed for possible barriers to accessibility.

Commitment: The Nutrient Management Act and its regulations will be reviewed to identify any barriers to accessibility.

Responsibility: Legal Services Branch.

Timeline: Summer 2007.

For more information

Questions or comments about the ministry's accessibility plan are always welcome.

Please phone:

General inquiry number: 416-325-4000

1-800 number: 1-800-565-4923

E-mail: picemail@ene.gov.on.ca

Ministry website address: www.ene.gov.on.ca

Visit the Ministry of Community and Social Services Accessibility Ontario web portal at: www.mcass.gov.on.ca/accessibility/index.html. The site promotes accessibility and provides information and resources on how to make Ontario a barrier-free province.

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